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27 January 1965

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE BULLETIN

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*South Vietnam: General Khanh this morning overthrew the Huong government by announcing that the military, who had handed over power to civilians last October, had withdrawn their confidence.

The military's bloodless move was rationalized on the grounds that Huong was unable to cope with the danger from rising Buddhist protests. A communiqué in the name of the Armed Forces Council stated that General Khanh had been entrusted with the task of resolving the crisis, and would immediately convene a joint military-civilian council to "advise" the new government on major decisions.

[Khanh has told Deputy Ambassador Johnson that the new council, with representatives of the country's major religions and regions, will in effect replace the High National Council which the military dissolved on 20 December.] The council, in accordance with the existing provisional charter, would name a chief of state to appoint a new premier, and would act as a legislature until a national congress is convened.

Chief of State Suu apparently will be redesignated in his present role, at least temporarily, and First Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Vien has agreed to act as premier until Huong's permanent successor is chosen. Khanh has indicated that ministerial changes will be kept to a minimum, that the military will retain their present cabinet posts, and that elections will be held in March as scheduled.

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Khanh's move is the culmination of more than a month of maneuvering to return to power with Buddhist support. [He claims that Buddhist leaders agreed in writing on 23 January to give full support for at least two years to a military takeover, as well as to abstain from politics and to dissolve their chaplain corps. He stated further that Tri Quang and another militant Buddhist had agreed orally to leave the country.]

[Suu, Huong, and Vien, who feel they have no choice but to accept the military fait accompli, have expressed grave concern about the direction of the government under a Khanh-Buddhist alliance. There are reports that the Buddhists are already proving troublesome about reaffirming the agreement.]

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Syria: Demonstrations by conservative elements protesting recent nationalization measures are continuing despite harsh retaliation by the military regime.

Disturbances similar to the four-day-old strike of Damascus merchants have been reported in several other Syrian cities. [The protests reportedly are being organized by a new grouping of religious, professional and conservative political elements.]

The socialist regime, deeply committed to its nationalization policies, shows every intention of continuing its firm action against the disorders. A special military court has already handed down eight death sentences, and a decree has been issued ordering confiscation of the property of merchants who continue the strike.

At the present time the conservatives and their allies lack the capability to imperil the Hafiz regime. However, their activity may encourage increased plotting against the government and could stir dissension within the army over the handling of the crisis.

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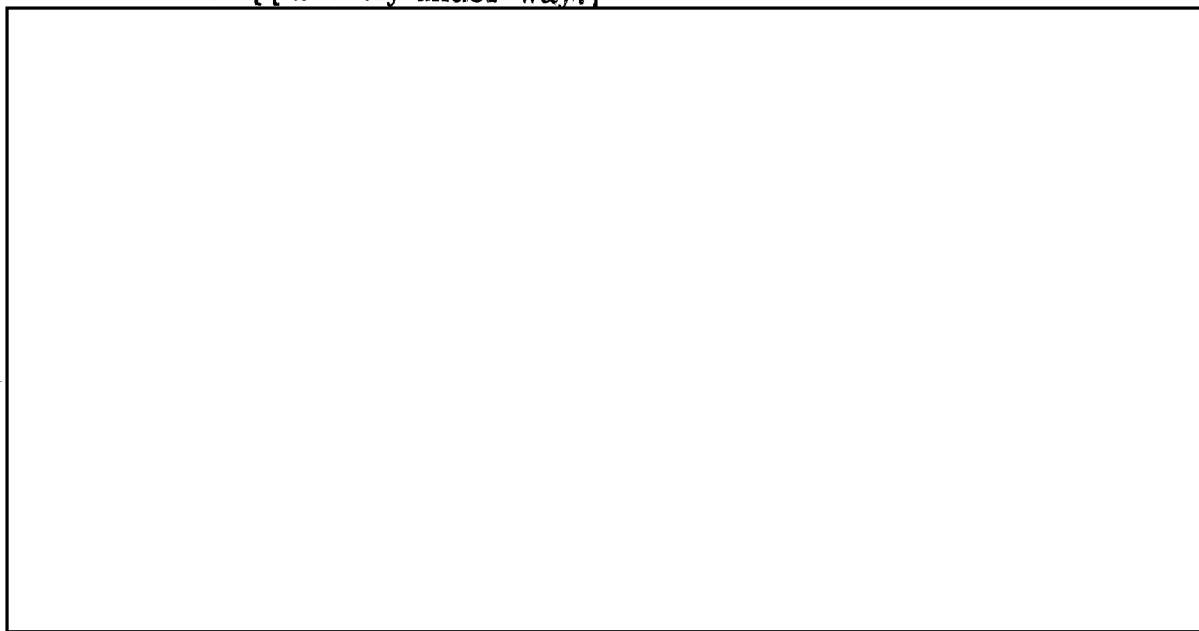
NOTES

Iran: The death of Prime Minister Mansur will have little effect on the Shah's reform program or the character of the present government. Finance Minister Hoveida, a close friend and follower of Mansur who was named acting prime minister following the shooting last Thursday, will probably continue in office for the time being.

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a drive to arrest all known or suspected religious and political fanatics is apparently under way.

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Thailand: The Communists appear to be stepping up their propaganda in Thailand. On 23 January a clandestine Communist-operated radio station on the Lao - North Vietnam border announced the formation of a "Patriotic Front of Thailand," which will probably promote the Communist line in elections slated for later this year. In recent months the Communists have called for the ouster of the Thanom government and the "imperialist master," and formed another front called the Thai Independence Movement.

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*Dominican Republic: Triumvirate President Reid may risk a confrontation with certain military elements if he goes through with plans to remove the ineffectual secretary of state for the armed forces, Major General Vinas Roman. Several officers representing the more reactionary elements among the military have indicated they will resist such a move. Reid, however, still appears to have enough military backing to sustain his authority against such a challenge, and may assume Vinas' position himself.

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